

## **RESIDENT SURVEY**

A resident survey is a useful tool in the planning process. Conducted at the beginning of the plan update process, survey results help the Planning Commission identify issues which needed to be addressed. Surveys also help insure that the focus of the plan update is relevant to citizens concerns. At the same time, however, surveys must only be conducted in conjunction with other studies, since the results are not necessarily representative of all town residents unless careful sampling techniques are used.

The Brunswick Planning Commission conducted a resident survey in Fall 1991. The purposes of the survey included:

- 1) to give citizens the opportunity to comment on City government, growth and development, streets, and public services and facilities;
- 2) to identify issues which need to be addressed in the updated Plan; and
- 3) to publicize the Plan Update process.

Surveys were distributed by City employees as they read water meters. Residents were instructed to return the survey to one of several locations in Brunswick. A total of 167 surveys were submitted and tabulated. Many surveys included a number of written comments. Several other surveys were submitted after the information was summarized and tabulated. All of the surveys were reviewed by members of the City Planning Commission.

### **Characteristics of Respondent Households**

The survey results indicated that the respondents represented a variety of household types. A total of 167 surveys were submitted. This represented 9.2% of the City's 1,810 households. Almost half of the respondents lived in households with children under 19 year olds. About one-third lived in adult households with no children. Nearly 20% lived in single person households. About half of the single person households were over 65 years old. The average household size of respondent households was 2.85 persons.

A comparison of the age breakdown of the population represented by the survey with the City's 1990 population age breakdown indicated that the surveyed households comprised a fairly representative sample of the City population, at least in terms of age. It is not known whether the survey respondents represented both owners and renters or all the income groups in the City.

The survey results suggested that the survey respondents represent both old and new residents. 47 respondents, or 28% of the total respondents indicated that either they or their spouse were born and raised in Brunswick.

The survey respondents represented both those who work in Frederick County and those who commute out of the County. Over half of the respondent households had at least one member who worked in Frederick County. Nearly a third (31%) of the households included a member who commutes to Montgomery County and nearly a quarter (23%) included a commuter to

Washington, D.C. About 15% of the respondents indicated that the members of their household were retired or unemployed. About 22% of the respondents indicated that they or a member of their household used the MARC train.

### **General Attitudes about Brunswick**

Several questions on the survey indicated the general attitude of the respondent about the City as a place to live. When asked why they chose to live in Brunswick, over one-third of the respondents noted that Brunswick is an affordable place to live. Of those 56 persons, 7 felt that the Town is no longer an affordable place. About 28% of the respondents noted that they were born and raised in Brunswick. Nearly 20% of the respondents noted that they were attracted by the small town atmosphere, including the friendliness of the people, low crime rates, and the small family businesses in the community. The location and accessibility of Brunswick to job locations was another reason cited by several respondents. About 20 respondents cited the MARC train as a reason they chose to live in Brunswick.

When asked whether they felt the City of Brunswick efficiently serves the needs of the residents, 47% of the respondents said "yes", and 37% said "no". About 5% answered "yes and no" and cited positive and negative things about the City. The remaining 11% did not answer the question. The comments indicated a variety of feelings about City government and services. -Among the dissatisfied respondents, high taxes and water and sewer rates were noted. Others noted that lack of businesses and activities in town as a reason for dissatisfaction. Several respondents noted the need for a taxi service or transportation service for the elderly.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to rate Brunswick as a place to live. About 40% of the respondents to question 23 felt that Brunswick is an excellent "very good" or "good" place to live and another 20% rated Brunswick as "O.K." or "fine". Most respondents noted positive qualities such as "friendly", "Venice community", "safe", and that they liked the small town or rural setting. About 15% of the respondents gave the town a more negative rating -- "fair", poor or "terrible". Others noted it is too expensive, rundown, and lacking businesses and employment opportunities. Three persons responded that they would move out of Brunswick if they were able.

Affordability was clearly a concern of Brunswick residents, as indicated by responses to question 3, "Would you support raising taxes to provide additional town services?" Over two-thirds of the respondents said "no", less than one-quarter said "yes". About 40 persons mentioned that they felt taxes were high enough or too high already. Of those who responded "yes", many qualified their answer to indicate they would only support a tax increase for specific projects or improvements in, services, or only as a last resort.

When asked whether the City of Brunswick had become a better place to live over the last five years, about half of the survey respondents said "yes", and about one-third said "no", with the remainder responding both yes or no or not responding at all. Respondents seem more optimistic about the future: over 60% think that Brunswick will become a better place to live over the next five years and only 15% thought it would not become a better place.

In summary, while indicating some degree of satisfaction with living in Brunswick, nearly all the survey respondents indicated some concerns about the city and its future. These concerns included: the condition of the downtown area and the need for revitalization; the lack of businesses and jobs in the community; the cost of living in Brunswick, including the taxes and utility rates; the lack of activities for children and youth in town; and the need generally for properties to be cleaned up and maintained.

### **Attitudes and Opinions about Streets**

The survey asked residents about the adequacy of City streets in terms of paving and maintenance, width, lighting, street name signs, traffic control signs and lights, parking, and pedestrian and bicycle paths.

One hundred forty-five (145) persons commented on the adequacy of street paving and maintenance. Seventy nine (79) of them, or 54%, did not feel that paving and maintenance was adequate. Of the 146 persons commenting on street widths, 93 or 64% felt that City streets were wide enough. Several respondents commented that although streets need to be widened, they did not feel it was possible to widen them. Respondents seemed even more satisfied with street lighting: over 85 % of the 136 answering question 6 felt street lighting was adequate. Nearly 74 % of the 141 persons commenting on street name signs thought they were adequate. The comments on street name signs primarily focused on their visibility. Several people commented that the signs needed to be bigger with more visible and reflective lettering. Others requested that abbreviated street names, such as "Bswk. ", "Del. ", and "Va. " not be used on signs.

One hundred forty (140) persons commented on intersections. About 59% of them felt that there were intersections which needed traffic control signs or stop lights. At least 37 respondents noted the need for more traffic control at the intersection of Petersville Road, B Street, A Street and the bridge to Virginia. At least 17 respondents commented on the need for a light at the corner of N. Maple Avenue and Souder Road. The intersection of Maple and East A Street was also noted by several persons as a problem intersection. About 5 respondents noted the need for a light at S. Maple and E. Potomac Street. The section of East D Street between Second Avenue and Fifth Avenue was noted as a problem area.

Questions 9, 10, and 11 gave respondents the opportunity to comment on parking and the need for new streets, pedestrian paths and bicycle paths. Many parking comments related to parking in the townhouse area off Maple Avenue, both the need for more parking and problems with enforcing the parking rules (2 car/house limit). At least 23 respondents felt that parking meters in town should be eliminated.

Very few people commented on the need for new roads in the City. Of those who did comment, most comments focused on the need for more east-west connections between Maple and Fifth Avenue. Comments regarding pedestrian paths included the need for sidewalks leading to the schools, sidewalks along Souder Road, and sidewalks on N. Maple leading to the shopping center. Several people commented that the canal tow path is an excellent pedestrian/bike path. Several people commented on the need to maintain and provide new sidewalks. Some felt the town should

take responsibility for them, others felt owners should be required to maintain or provide sidewalks.

While many residents expressed concerns about streets in Brunswick, several people indicated that these problems should not be a high priority in the allocation of limited resources. Several respondents indicated that they did not feel the Town could afford to improve streets or sidewalks. Others said that they felt that there are more important issues facing the Town.

### **Attitudes and Opinions about Services**

Residents were given the opportunity to comment on water, sewer, police, parks/recreation, public works, refuse pick-up, recycling facilities, the swimming pool, the campsite, fire, ambulance, and senior citizen's services. The number of people commenting on each service varied. Respondents commented most frequently on water service and police service and also seemed to feel the most strongly about these two services as well.

About 78% of the 167 survey respondents commented on water service. About 46% of those commenting indicated that the service was adequate or better. While only 5% indicated service was poor, fair, or bad, over 30% of those commenting felt the service is too expensive. Problems with pressure, sediment and taste were also noted.

About two-thirds of the respondents commented on sewer service. Of those responding, over two-thirds noted that the service was adequate or better. Cost again was the most frequently mentioned problem: 18% of those commenting felt the service was too expensive.

One hundred twenty six (126) persons commented on police service. A little over half of them indicated that they felt that the service was adequate or better. Comments on police service ranged from extremely positive to extremely negative. Some felt that they are a responsive, professional organization while others cited problems such as waste, officer attitudes and treatment of people, police cars speeding through town, the need for more training, and the need for better relations between the citizens and the police. Several people commented that they like the new chief and are hopeful about the future under his leadership. Many comments were focused on the need for more patrols in various parts of the City and the need to control speeding and loitering in Brunswick.

About 70% of the respondents commented on parks and recreation services. About 53% of those commenting indicated that parks and recreation were adequate or better. Comments focused on the need for more facilities and for more children's and youth programs.

Residents were also asked which park facilities they or someone in their household used in the last year. Of the 143 persons indicating their park use, 89 or 62% used the City Park, 55% used the swimming pool, 44% used the canal park, and 35% used the ball fields. All of the facilities were used by at least 20% of those who answered the question. Only 9% of those responding did not use any park and recreational facility in town in the last year.

About 70 % of the respondents commented on public works. About 59 % of those commenting felt service was adequate or better. Most of the comments focused on snow removal and ranged from those who felt that the service was the best on the east coast to those who thought the service was deplorable.

Of the 121 persons who commented on refuse pick-up, 80% indicated that they felt the service was adequate or better; Several people felt that more than one trash pick-up per week was needed.

One hundred eleven (111) persons commented on the recycling facilities, with about 75 % of those commenting indicating the facility is adequate or better. A few people noted the need for a receptacle for green and brown glass. Others suggested that town-wide, curbside pick-up be instituted. A few respondents indicated that they did not know the town had a recycling facility.

Of the 98 who commented on the swimming pool, 71 % indicated that the facility is adequate or better. Several people commented on the need for an expanded or new facility. Others requested that the hours of operation and season be extended.

Less than half of the respondents commented on the campsite. Over 70% of those commenting indicated that the facility is adequate or better. Comments on the campsite were both positive and negative. Some noted that it is "clean", "well maintained", and "one of the better things in Brunswick", while others said "too much drinking", "dangerous after dark", and that it should be closed.

Of the 107 persons who commented on fire service, 82% felt that the service is adequate or better. Several felt that the members lack professionalism and have a bad reputation. Several commented on the responsiveness and dedication of the members. A number of people complained about the noisy siren, especially at night.

About 62% of the respondents commented on ambulance service, with 90% of those commenting indicating that service was adequate or better. Nearly all the comments on the service were very positive, including "responsive", "very professional", and "dedicated".

Only 67 persons commented on senior citizens services, with 75% of those commenting noting that services were adequate or better. A few commented that services could be improved. The need for a taxi service for the elderly was noted.

### **Attitudes and Opinions about Growth and Development**

Based on the survey, it appears that most City residents would like to see Brunswick grow. Sixty six (66%) of the survey respondents favored growth in the Brunswick area, and 22% said that they did not favor growth (12% did not answer the question). About 27% of the respondents felt that the City should expand its boundaries for residential, commercial, and industrial uses. About a third of the respondents said that they would not want to see any industrial growth, while another third preferred no additional residential growth. Of those who answered the question, 56% favored residential growth, 68% favored commercial growth, and 58% favored industrial growth.

When asked what kind of residential uses should be permitted, single family residences on lots between 1/4 and 1/2 acre in size was the most frequently mentioned option. Townhouses and single-family dwellings were preferred by at least 30% of the respondents. Apartments and condominiums were less frequently mentioned.

Over 78% of the respondents felt the town needs additional industry. Service industries and light manufacturing were preferred industry types by over half the respondents. Only 19% of respondents favored heavy manufacturing uses.

Survey respondents also favor additional commercial development in Brunswick. A majority of respondents would like to see more retail businesses, restaurants, sports facilities, and entertainment facilities in town. The interest in commercial growth was also indicated by the fact that only one person did not answer the question regarding preferred new business and only two persons felt no new businesses were needed. Many persons indicated that they would like to see another grocery store in town, as well as a movie theater, a bowling alley, and a big chain store such as a K-Mart, Hechinger's or Sears. At least 38 respondents specifically indicated that they would like to see another grocery store in Brunswick.

In summary, the lack of businesses and economic opportunities in Brunswick was a primary concern expressed by residents. Many expressed concerns about vacant commercial spaces in the downtown area. Many felt that the key to the future of the town lies in the town's ability to attract businesses and industries. Growth was seen as a way to ease the financial burden on tax payers.

## **Summary**

It is difficult to summarize 167 surveys in which residents were given many opportunities to comment. Many respondents provided a number of specific comments and suggestions which can not be included in a summary of all the surveys and which are not included in the tabulated information. However, it is clear that many people in Town had a number of common concerns including:

- The cost of Town taxes and utilities.
- The need for additional businesses in Town to serve the residents.
- The need for employment opportunities and industries in Town.
- The need for growth in the Town to ease the financial burden on resident taxpayers.
- The need for youth and children's activities in Town.
- The need for a taxi or bus service, particularly for the elderly.
- The condition of the downtown area and need for revitalization.
- The need for clean up and maintenance of properties.

While all of the survey results can provide guidance to City officials, some of the survey results are beyond the scope of the Master Plan. In particular, issues such as youth and children's activities will not be addressed directly in this Plan.